

Udskrift af interview med Bosch Fawstin

Let's start with who you are. Why did you decide to leave Islam?

- I was in my mid-teens and the life in my family was very different from the life outside my family at school. I had Jewish friends. I had friends who were girls. I had friends who were basically in happy families.

- My family was pretty brutal. They were physically abusive whereas my friends' families were not. They were very happy kids and to me that was normal. What we were was abnormal. There was just too much contrast there and I did not like it. I did not want to be a part of it.

- And one thing I recognize would also be the constant lies from my family being told about Jews, about America, about women in particular. And I just didn't want to be a part of it anymore and I left.

What is your relationship today with your family?

- I don't have a relationship with my family.

So they cut you off?

- It was a slow bit of break, but no, I don't have any contact with them.

When did you begin drawing professionally?

- It was 14-16 years ago. When I published my first book, which was a graphic novel called *Table for One*.

- I had worked in the restaurant business for years and I wanted to use my experiences and I decided to write an 80-page story. I was nominated for two awards for it from the Eisner Awards, which is considered the Oscars of comics. It is a very prestigious award and it was great to be nominated. It was in 2004 I published that.

One year later, 2005, was the Muhammed crisis which was sparked here in Denmark. What impact did it have on your cartoonist career?

- 9/11 to me was what brought it all back. I had left Islam. I had no interest in it. I had heard stories about bombings but 9/11 for me brought it all back and that's when I wanted to revisit Islam.

- I had never read the Quran. Most of my family members had never read the Quran. They were just in the 'atmosphere of Islam'. They were anti-Jew, they didn't eat pork, but they didn't practice it much.

- I, on the other hand, had read the Quran twice. I had read every book I could get my hands on and I studied religion because I knew I would take it on in my work. I knew I would be writing a story about it and then, when the cartoon crisis happened in 2005, I had no idea about the prohibition of drawing Muhammed. My family didn't even teach me that and technically speaking there was no prohibition because even the Shias (Shia Muslims, red.) had been drawing Muhammed for centuries.

- To me it is only a point about them wanting to control the West in this modern era and during this global Jihad. That is all it is about. It is not about this locked in prohibition. It is about them trying to control us and them trying to make us like them. If Muhammed is not drawn Islamical, they don't want Muhammed to be drawn *anywhere*.

- So, that's why in 2005 I said: "Wait a minute, you can be killed for drawing Muhammed?" So what did I do? I drew Muhammed because that is what a normal person who loves the freedom of speech does. So that's why I began to draw Muhammed in 2005 and then when Charlie Hebdo was fire-bombed in 2011-2012 I drew Muhammed again .. but in 2010 - a little before that, actually - I drew Muhammed more and more and then of course after the massacre at Charlie Hebdo I decided to draw him even more. Do you want me to keep going or do you want me to stop and you can ask a new question?

No, it is okay. You can just keep on flash-forwarding.

- After the Charlie Hebdo massacre Muslims in Texas got together and had this conference that was basically in defence of the prophet - in defence of Muhammed. They had no concern for those who were slaughtered. They had no concern that free speech was under siege. They only were concerned with their prophet as if he was abused somehow by these cartoonists.

- So Pamela Geller responded to that by having a Muhammed cartoon contest that would be held at the same place as the Muslim conference was at in the Curtis Culwell Center on May 3rd in 2015. And I entered.

- I had a pretty good idea that I would win, I am not being arrogant about it, but I had been drawing Muhammed for years at that point. I had drawn him a dozen times at that point in all different kinds of ways, so I said: "Well, I probably will have a good opportunity in winning this".

- And I entered it and I was told that there were 350 different entries .. and I was invited to be at the event and I asked: "Did I win?" I wanted to be sure before I went. They said: "Just come and we will see". I said: "Ok". I went there and I was announced and I delivered a speech, and one of the things I said in my speech was: "Why do you think there is this kind of security here? Why do you think we have this kind of heavy security? Because they are going to knock me in peace".

- Within a half hour two Jihadists from Arizona, who drove to Texas, came out of their cars shooting. Fortunately they were shot down by a cop, they had their heads blown off. People tell me it was a terrible thing, but it was not terrible. I went to defend free speech and two Jihadists came to murder us and they were killed. To me that is not a bad day. The bad guys lost. The good guys won and freedom of speech was defended and .. Hello?

Yes? Sorry, I'm just listening.

- I'm sorry. I just heard a beep.

Not from here.

- After that there were threats. I kept more precautions. I had to be in touch with local authorities, with the FBI. And ever since then it has not been great. But - I will say one more thing - the most threats I have ever gotten in my entire life was two years ago after I was announced the judge for another Muhammed cartoon contest with Geert Wilders from the Netherlands. And for some reason - I don't know why - that got me more death threats.

- Literally, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of death threats on every platform possible. I have been banned from platforms for criticizing Islam, for drawing Muhammed, for criticizing those who promote Islam. But still they found their way into private messaging, found my blog, and my e-mails. And then what I decided to do was to use those death threats in a book series called *Peaceful Death Threats*. And I have two volumes. I probably will have four.

- Since they gave me death threats for Muhammed cartoons, I drew new Muhammed cartoons and I published them - one Muhammed cartoon on the eighth page with about half a dozen death threats around it. And I published those. And the reason why I called it *Peaceful Death Threats* is because in some of the death threats they tell me: "I'm gonna cut your head off. I'm gonna rape you. I'm gonna murder you. And Islam is a religion of peace." They literally say this. They tell me that Islam means peace and then how much they want to murder me.

Before we go on to talk about The Shady Garden - do you think these people are representative for Islam because there are so many, there are millions of Muslims in the world. So even though you get thousands of death threats they are just a marginal part of all the Muslims living in the world?

- Yes, but the problem with that is that the marginal part happens to be the core, meaning that when Muhammed engaged in Jihad, when these Jihadists engage in Jihad, they are following the model of the perfect Muslim. That's the problem. The ones who don't do that - good. I am happy about that. But they can't tell me that they are devout Muslims, that they are practicing Islam the way it was intended to be practiced because when we have the perfect model who engage in violence - and they don't engage in violence - they are not following the perfect model.

- That's the main reason, meaning that the more like Muhammed Muslims are, the more violent they are. So while a lot of Muslims are peaceful, absolutely, they are not peaceful because of the Quran. They are peaceful because of themselves, they are peaceful because of their own lack of violence, they want to exist in a world more normalized, they have become more Western, they have become less Islamic.

- You know, the more Islamic an individual becomes, the more violent they become. So yes, a lot of Muslims are peaceful, but it's not because of Islam. Islam does not happen to be peaceful. And there is something in the Quran also which is called the doctrine of abrogation which is that there are passages in the Quran which tell Muslims: You have your religion, we have ours. Basically, live and let live.

- But then there are passages about cutting peoples necks and cutting their finger tips and killing them. And what experts tell Muslims is that if there are passages later in the Quran that contradict the earlier ones you go with the later ones, meaning that if it talks about peace and later talks about killing, you go with the one that has killing. There is a passage called "The Verse of the Sword" and in every chapter of the Quran there is a preamble about the beneficence of Allah, about the mercy of Allah. This passage doesn't have it and it is the second or last passage in the Quran which declares war for all time.

This is a perfect bridge for me somehow. I mean you are obviously very critical of the Quran but then why did you want to be a part of Kaare Bluitgen's project with this - the illustrated Quran?

- Great question. Because visualizing these things basically show you the truth. Regardless of the intent. Meaning regardless of what Kaare and the publisher and what others might believe. Me simply drawing Muhammed, simply drawing Allah, is an act against Islam. It is critical by the nature of that.

- Simply drawing Allah, to me I think it might be the first time that Allah has been visualized. People think that Muhammed is forbidden to be drawn. I imagine they believe the same about Allah. So I don't think an average Muslim who reads the book would think it is favorable.

- And also there is a double page with Muhammed in his harem with his wives and concubines and a very young Aisha is being brought in. He married her when she was six and had sex with her when she was nine.

That's the blue drawing you are talking about now?

- Yes. Exactly. Regardless of the intent of being involved I know that simply visualizing these things would tell a truth that the Quran itself tells. People can look at it and say, wait a minute, he is with an incredibly young girl there, I cannot take that as a positive thing.

- I have been asked that question as well: Why would you do that? Because nobody else would do it. Nobody. I assumed he had found another artist because he was looking at ours for years. I assumed he had found one and I did not even know about it. So then I saw on a website that he was looking for artists. I said: Is he still looking? I will join this. Then we had a little discussion and that was it.

- And again, no one else was willing to draw it. I'm willing to draw it. I'm a working artist. I want my work to be out there. I have eight books on my own, I have a few columns, I have thousands of cartoons. I want my work out there as much as it can be.

- However someone might view this, the fact that Muhammed is drawn in the book which is forbidden for some Muslims, the fact that Allah is drawn, the fact that Aisha is drawn in that kind of situation, I think it's part of Islamic history, part of Islamic truth. People believe these things even though they deny the fact that Aisha was as young as she was. She was six years old when he married her and then he raped her when she was nine. There is no consent at that point.

- Those are the things it's important to show. Regardless of the intent and those who read it. It's not a positive reflection on Islam no matter what they believe. I just think it's important to show these things... The only thing we are allowed to hear is "oh, Islam is peace - don't say anything else". That's the whole idea. So visualizing these things was for me important to be a part of the book.

Why do you think so many people turned it down?

- Because of the death threats. Because of the fact that they may lose jobs. Personally, I can't even say how many jobs I have lost because I have not gotten many. I self-publish. I've worked for some publications, which are not afraid to take me on. I have written a piece called *The Draw Muhammed Challenge*. It is basically referred to as my manifesto of free speech, and there I take on all those who refuse to do it.

- I don't want my world, the Western civilization, to be like the Islamic world. You can't draw Muhammed in the Islamic world, and now you can't draw Muhammed in the Western world. That's unacceptable to me. It's unacceptable. I want to have the freedom to draw what I want and to think what I want.

- I was very happy to see that Charlie Hebdo republished those cartoons, because some years ago they said they weren't going to draw Muhammed anymore. And yes, they are getting death threats, but free speech is more important than fear. Without free speech we are not a civilized society. We

cannot argue anymore. We cannot try to persuade people anymore. It is all about force and brutality. And I don't want to live in that world.

But having freedom of speech or freedom of expression does not necessarily mean that you should use it all the time. It's a privilege that you can but do you think it's always necessary to use it, if you hurt people in the process?

- Well, how does a cartoon hurt people? How?

If you feel that your boundaries are being overstepped somehow?

- Well, the way I see it, after human beings were slaughtered for drawing Muhammed cartoons there were no more arguments about 'feelings'. How about the feelings of the families to those who were murdered? How about those feelings? These people will never see their loved ones again - ever. They were slaughtered over cartoons. So I have no sympathy, no respect for those who try to cry to me and say: "Hey, you hurt my feelings".

- Look at those who were slaughtered. What do you say about those people? They were murdered. Their families, their loved ones, their wives, their husbands, their children will never see them again, because you were upset about cartoons? And not only were they murdered. They also had the support of a lot of muslims. The average muslims, who were peacefully critical, didn't speak out against those massacres. They didn't rally against them. They didn't have protests against them. They were in support of it. I've never had one muslim ever contacting me, who said: "I respect your freedom to do, what you wan't. I may be hurt. I may don't like it. But you have the right to do it".

- I've never heard that. Why? My cartoons cannot hurt anyone unless they want to be hurt by it. A cartoon is a cartoon. After people are slaughtered there is no more discussion to me about hurting others with cartoons. They murdered people over cartoons. That to me crossed the line into the part where I have zero sympathy for those who are critical. They have lost their humanity. The only thing they're concerned about is cartoons, not the people who are murdered.

*What is your main goal with illustrating the book *The Shady Gardens*?*

- I want to visualize these things. And it's important for me to do that. First of all, because nobody else was willing to do it. As you said, people agreed to do it, and then they decided not to. I am beyond that point. I understand the battle that is being waged here.

- Without free speech we are not a civilization. We cannot persuade people. We cannot argue anymore. We cannot discuss issues. We need to know that we can say whatever we want, wherever we want. And if people get hurt, so be it.

- Not only Muslims don't like our cartoons. Leftists don't like them. Even people on the right don't like them. Conservatives don't like them. And that's fine. I just know that for my life, for my conscience, it's very important for me to visualize these things that we are told cannot be visualized. It's very important for me because I want to live as a free man until the day I die. That's it.